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### Food, faith and community

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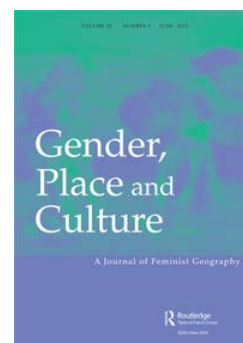
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**Title:** Food, faith and community: social well-being of Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands

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- Qualitative research

# **Food, faith and community: social well-being of Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands**

## **Abstract**

This article explores how Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands enhance their gendered social well-being. We provide an in-depth view of gender-specific places and relations that shape the social well-being of migrants, focusing on place-based lived experiences, by conducting in-depth interviews and observations. Our results demonstrate that social well-being is enhanced by social networks, wherein the participants recreate feelings of self-esteem, belonging and recognition. Furthermore, the special meaning of food and faith also contributes to the social well-being of the participants. Food and faith serve as commemorations of traditions in their home country and alleviate the transition to new traditions in the host country. We also found that specific places, such as shops and churches, contribute to the social well-being of participants in the study. Men and women in our study use different strategies to construct their well-being, and they interpret places and social relations differently, but they all showed to be active agents in enhancing their social well-being. Our female participants in particular look for opportunities in the host country to independently enhance their social well-being, for instance through establishing their own small businesses and social groups. Through its focus on the social well-being of migrants, the study contributes to increase understanding between different cultural groups.

**Keywords:** migration; social well-being; social networks; Ghana; the Netherlands; qualitative research

## **1. Introduction**

The role of culture and place in migration patterns and decisions has received much attention in geographic literature (e.g. Fleuret and Atkinson 2007; Panelli and Tipa 2007; King 2012). Both culture and place are identified to be (re)constructed continuously when people move from one place to another (Boyle, Halfacree, and Robinson 1998; Massey 2005). This continuous consideration of place and culture and the changes they undergo affects the well-being of migrants, positively and/or

negatively (Gu 2010; Rosenblum and Tichenor 2012). Attention to immigrants' general health and well-being has also opened a discussion on the role of social well-being, especially due to globalization and widening transnational networks and connections. Studies focusing on well-being and its relationship to social networks have been carried out among various populations groups, including immigrants (e.g. Hagan 1998; Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 2006; Yip et al. 2007), and have shown some of the different roles these social networks can play in the social well-being.

Although research shows the importance of culture and place in the migration process (Boyle, Halfacree, and Robinson 1998; Christou 2006; Rosenblum and Tichenor 2012), culture and place have rarely been studied in depth in relation to (social) well-being (Diener 2009; Rollero and De Picolli 2010). We address this gap by focusing on the Ghanaian place-based lived experiences in the Netherlands and provide an in-depth view of social well-being as experienced by Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands. It is important to understand the perceptions of well-being among the migrant population, especially when migrating from one cultural context to another. Feminist geographers previously stated migration processes are experienced differently by men and women (Hagan 1998; Curran and Saguy 2001; Gu 2010). Therefore, we include a gendered perspective in studying the social well-being of the Ghanaian migrant group in the Netherlands. An in-depth understanding of changes in the living environment may give insights on the manner in which migrants cope with the process of migration and the impact it has on their social well-being.

For migrants entering the Netherlands from the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is more difficult to obtain a legal status and they are confronted with a state that is not very hospitable to migrants (Choenni 2002). There are politicians who feel that Ghanaian migrants are oriented towards their home country and do not invest much in the Dutch economy and society (Mazzucato 2008).

In addition to economic opportunities, the other motives for Ghanaian migration to the Netherlands include family reunification and family formation (Kraan 2001; Anarfi et al. 2003). Two distinct phases

of Ghanaian migration to the Netherlands can be identified. The first phase covered the period from 1974 to 1983 and commenced with the oil crisis in 1973, which impacted Ghana as an oil-importing nation. The second flow of immigrants from Ghana entered the Netherlands at the end of the 1980s. This was related to a period of extreme drought in Ghana, political instability and the banishment of Ghanaians from Nigeria. While the first arrival of migrants into the Netherlands did not draw much attention, the second wave came under scrutiny because of concern over the immigrants' often illegal status and perceived criminality. The group became even more visible in 1992 following the plane crash in Bijlmermeer, a neighbourhood in Amsterdam, among whose victims were illegal Ghanaian migrants (Choenni 2002). There is some literature on Ghanaian migrants and the problems they experience with regard to their position in the Netherlands (Knipscheer and Kleber 2007; Mazzucato 2008), but there is little research on their social well-being in Dutch society.

The number of Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands has been increasing since 2000. In 1996, the official number of Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands was 12,480 persons. This number had increased to 21,922 by 1 January 2012 (CBS 2012), of which 10,859 (49.5%) are men and 11,063 (50.5%) are women.

## **2. Social well-being, culture and place**

With the growing attention to well-being, it also becomes evident that the concept is difficult to define. Although it is a popular concept in recent research, it still remains without a conclusive definition. Some question the usefulness of studies on well-being (Gasper 2004; Veenhoven 2004), contending that the term 'well-being' is interpreted in a variety of ways and applied to social systems as well as to individuals. Geographers (such as Atkinson, Fuller, and Painter 2012) as well as cognitive disciplines (such as Gasper 2004) argue that well-being should not always be measured in quantitative terms, but should be subject to rich qualitative description. From this perspective, the term well-being is always

subject to a person's own interpretation. Research states that the well-being of migrants is a multilevel, dynamic and value-dependent concept (Brah 2008; Prilleltensky 2008). The well-being of the migrant is multileveled, not only at individual level, but also at the level of community and society. From a geographical perspective, it is indicated that components of well-being that are embedded in a cultural context cannot easily be conveyed to other cultural settings without negotiating between old and new cultural interpretations (Crang, Dwyer, and Jackson 2003; Panelli and Tipa 2007). Also cultural psychologists argue that the personality of migrants might be very different from the personalities and behaviour of the host population, which sets them apart from the 'cultural norm'. Fulmer et al. (2010) conclude that migrants often feel displaced when they differ from this cultural norm (for a Ghanaian perspective, see Mazzucato 2008). Furthermore, Boyle, Halfacree, and Robinson (1998) indicate that there are different ways of seeing places and highlight that a dominant culture can strongly impact the migration flows to a country and also the sense of place that migrants develop within a host country. In the process of resettling in a society, migrants often undergo a journey in which they invent and recreate culture, while still maintaining connections to both the home country and the host country (Meijering and van Hoven 2003; Werbner 2012). When cultural conditions change, places could obtain new meanings. By applying a place-based approach to culture and well-being, we theoretically link the local processes with broader understandings that form the senses of well-being (Panelli and Tipa 2007; Christou and King 2010).

By defining the social well-being of immigrants in their own terms, we can portray the concept of social well-being more broadly. Well-being, and specifically social well-being, is related to the subjective experiences of individuals in a place. Social well-being is described in this article as peoples' place-based evaluation of their social relations and emotions related to social relations (based on Helliwell and Putnam 2004; Diener 2009), such as a sense of belonging.

### **3. Social well-being, social networks and place**

Social networks personify emotions related to social well-being. Furthermore, the consideration of place shows how social relations and structures affect the sense of social well-being as well as the development of social norms in the host country (Panelli and Tipa 2007).

The social network has gained prominence as a key concept in the social sciences in the last two decades (see, for example, Knoke and Yang 2008). According to social network theory, individuals who shape a social network are connected in various ways and these connections determine the extent of the relationships and the structure of the network. Massey et al. (1993) define migrant networks as 'interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship and shared community origin' (448). Social networks can foster feelings of well-being, as they nurture a sense of identity and self-esteem during the process of social change and adjustment to the new society (Morrow 1999; Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 2006). In a review of literature on social networks, Ebaugh and Curry (2000) argue that social networks serve several functions and have effects on educational achievement, income, entry into organizations, potential for career achievement, migration destinations and return migration. Social networks also influence social ties with kin, ties with the home country, and settlement experiences in the housing and labour market.

Studies on immigrant settlement often show the benefits of initial networks with (especially) co-ethnic migrants. Because the initial contacts are often strong ties, which support the migrants (both men and women) in finding jobs and housing, connection to other ties, for example with people outside their co-ethnic or migrant communities, are often neglected (Hagan 1998; McMichael and Manderson 2004). Hagan (1998) also found that male participants benefited more often from their social ties at work, whereas women did not have the same benefits because they tend to work on their own and in a domestic setting.

#### **4. Gender, social networks and social well-being**



In the literature we find more evidence of low levels of well-being among migrant women than among migrant men. Traditional gender characteristics, such as women's burden in caring for others, lower education and sensitivity to conflict, are potential explanations for these differences (Werkuyten and Nekuee 1999; Aroian, Norris, and Chiang 2003).

Social networks may enhance migrant women's sense of security and help them adjust to the host society. But some studies also show that migrant women are more concerned with social adjustment and adaptation to the host society (for example, McMichael and Manderson 2004), while migrant men viewed migration mainly in terms of change in economic conditions and were less concerned with the change in their traditions and mentality in the new environment (Çaro, Bailey, and van Wissen 2012).

Places of migration are sites that reflect the aspects of tradition and emancipation in different migrant groups. Some women, following a traditional pathway, create places in the traditional way, as they were used to in their home country. In this way women can enhance their well-being by recreating familiar places and involve in certain care practices (Kovács and Melegh 2007). Other migrant women, following a more emancipatory approach, create a new place. These women look to fulfil individual goals by looking for friendship and marriage within the host society (Kovács and Melegh 2007).

For this present study, some description of the status of women in Ghana is relevant. Compared to other African countries, women's status in Ghana is relatively high and they are relatively independent, financially as well as socially (Oishi 2002). This is reflected in the composition of the migrant group: women represent slightly more than half of all the Ghanaian migrants who came to the Netherlands in 2012. Their position in their home country makes it possible for women to migrate individually. Leaving for a place far from their home country, apart from their family, is a major part of their transition to adulthood (Cassiman 2008). Women as well as men can have very individual motivations when establishing themselves in their new environment.

Our theoretical framework includes the concepts of social well-being, place and culture, approached from a gendered perspective. These concepts help us study, in depth, the gendered place-based experiences of Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands. Our exploration of which places and emotions contribute to social well-being among Ghanaian migrants, and how gender differences affect their place-based experiences, may contribute to the increasing discussion on social well-being as a dynamic and subjective concept.

## **5. Methods**

Our data were primarily collected through 17 in-depth interviews with Ghanaian migrants carried out by the first author. The interview guide used for the interviews was discussed among the three authors, after which a pilot interview was conducted to assess the relevance of the questions as well as the comprehensibility of the questions to the interview subjects. Some adjustments were then made. The interview guide was set up in two languages, Dutch and English, to accommodate the preferences of the participants.

The interviews were conducted in April and May 2010, and included 7 females and 10 males. This study focused on Ghanaians who had been living in the Netherlands for at least one year. Participants were identified through snowball sampling in which the researchers ensured that participants were not all related to the same social network. This was accomplished by approaching several networks of friends and family, and also Ghanaian migrant organizations, which create meeting places and provide general support for migrants in the Netherlands. Although the majority of the Ghanaians in the Netherlands live in Amsterdam and The Hague, only a few of the participants were from these cities, which added to a breadth of experiences. Table 1 shows the characteristics of the participants.

Participation in the study was voluntary and the information shared by the participants has been anonymized. To protect their identities, all the participants were given pseudonyms.

Information for the study was also gathered from observations in a Ghanaian shop and a church service (April and May 2010). As culture cannot be easily expressed in interviews, these observations contributed towards a better understanding of the lives of the migrants as well as their well-being in the context of various places.

All interviews were recorded and literally transcribed. Both interviews and observations were analysed with the help of MaxQDA, a software package for qualitative data analysis, by linking codes, categories and themes to the stories of the participants and relating these to each other. First, general codes were given to paragraphs in each interview, to keep them in context, and then more specific codes were developed to categorize sentences. The code tree and the coded interviews were discussed among all three authors.

The first author was aware of her positionality. She had previous experience with other African cultures and had worked in African countries, and this enables her to understand the lives of Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands. The third author also contributed her experiences of working with Ghanaian people. A significant amount of time was spent on the establishment of rapport to reduce the unfamiliarity between the interviewer/observer and the participants and to take into account the sensitivity of some topics in the interview. In her role the researcher could give the participants the opportunity to open up about their experiences.

## **6. Results**

This section presents the results of the interviews and observations. In the interviews, participants were asked to reflect on their social well-being and to describe their social networks and places they felt were important for them. The observations that took place later followed up the participants' descriptions of valued places. We will describe the experiences of the participants, supported by quotes from the participants, providing the reader with an in-depth view into the lives of the participants.

## 6.1 Food and gender roles

The processes and practices of buying, sharing, cooking and eating Ghanaian food emerged as an important aspect of well-being during the interviews.

In general, Ghanaian food is an important element of social settings in which the migrants feel comfortable. The traditional dishes of Ghana, such as red red and fufu, are prepared on a regular basis and ingredients for these dishes are found in Ghanaian shops.

Table 1. Characteristics of the participants.

Name	Sex	Age	Residential duration (years)	Partner	Employed	Dutch language proficiency	Locality of current residence
Abebe	Male	29	2	Yes (Ghanaian)	Yes (full-time)	No	Northern Netherlands, middle-sized city
Abena	Female	39	20	Yes (Dutch)	Yes (part-time)	Yes	Northern Netherlands, village
Badú	Male	37	4	No	Yes (full-time)	No	Eastern Netherlands, middle-sized city
Doste	Male	24	5	No	No	No	Eastern-Netherlands, middle-sized city
Ebo	Male	37	17	Yes (Ivory Cost)	Yes (full-time)	Yes	Northern Netherlands, middle-sized city
Gita	Female	34	14	Yes (Ghanain)	No	Yes	Southern Netherlands, middle-sized city
Juba	Female	18	3	No	No	No	Northern Netherlands, middle-sized city
Kodyo	Male	36	1.5	Yes (Ghanaian)	No	No	Southern Netherlands, middle-sized city
Kofi	Male	31	1.5	No	No	No	Eastern Netherlands, middle-sized city
Kwaku	Male	48	16	No	Yes (full-time)	No	Southern Netherlands, middle-sized city
Kwami	Male	32	6	Yes (Ghanain)	No	No	Eastern Netherlands, middle-sized city
Mosi	Male	40	6	Yes (Ghanain)	Yes (part-time)	No	Southern Netherlands, middle-sized city
Panyin	Female	38	12	Yes (Ghanain)	Yes (full-time)	Yes	Northern Netherlands, middle-sized city
Selasi	Male	44	11	No	No	Yes	Southern Netherlands, Middle-sized city

Serwa	Female	Unknown	14	Yes (Dutch)	Yes (full-time)	Yes	Eastern Netherlands, middle-sized city
Tawiah	Female	33	1	No	No	No	Eastern Netherlands, village
Yaa	Female	30	8	Yes (Dutch)	Yes (part-time)	Yes	Eastern Netherlands, middle-sized city

199

200 Red red is a traditional Ghanaian stew made from cowpeas (black-eyed peas) and named after the  
 201 combination of red pepper and red palm oil used. In Ghana, stews are a prominent item of the local  
 202 cuisine. Fufu, a staple food of West and Central Africa, is made from boiled cassava and unripe plantain  
 203 mashed together, as well as from cocoyam. Fufu is served in large balls with a spicy soup or sauce. It is  
 204 then shaped into small balls with the fingers of the right hand, dipped in the soup and eaten.

205 Cooking for others is highly valued by the participants. Panyin explained in her interview that she likes  
 206 to prepare food for other families. It demonstrates affective ties to other migrants and supports friends  
 207 who do not have enough money for proper meals, Ghanaian or otherwise. She notes:

208 For some people I cook. It feels like a party to them. I cook food and take it to these people and they  
 209 are very happy. [ ... ] Some of my friends do not have a good job and so [by cooking] I can help them  
 210 to get some food from Ghana and then we talk a bit. (Female, age group 36 – 40, length of residence  
 211 in the Netherlands: 12 years)

212 There is a strong relationship between food and the way women shape their caring relationships with  
 213 family and friends. Food is an integral element of many social settings and the women in our study  
 214 expressed how their care-taking initiates and establishes social ties in their country of origin, as well  
 215 as in the Netherlands. These social relations contribute to feelings of happiness and well-being. In our  
 216 study, food symbolizes the hospitality of the Ghanaian migrants and a preservation of their values. The  
 217 everyday experience of cooking and eating can become a clear statement of their identity in the host  
 218 country. Memories of their life in Ghana are strongly related to cooking and sharing food, and shared  
 219 within a new environment, their food represents the places they come from. Most women in the study

220 expressed that cooking according to their traditions brought them joy, and they also found satisfaction  
221 in sharing cooking techniques they were taught in Ghana.

222 Taking another approach, Serwa has adapted her cooking and eating habits so she can enjoy food with  
223 her Dutch husband and make it a social experience, despite her family's disapproval of her changing  
224 eating habits. Serwa's case shows the dual nature of identity and the way food crosses cultural  
225 boundaries. The efforts of women such as Serwa indicate not only a change in food practices, but also,  
226 related to that, a change in lifestyle.

227 Serwa: The relationship [with my family] did change. It was difficult for them, that I left [ ... ], my eating  
228 habits changed.

229 Interviewer: You say your eating habits have changed?

230 Serwa: Before I was cooking much Ghanaian food, like fufu, plantain, every day there is different food.  
231 But now I am also cooking [Dutch food] for my husband [ ... ] I want to adapt to his habits. And I want  
232 to enjoy food, together with my husband. (Female, age unknown, length of residence in the  
233 Netherlands: 14 years)

234 For the Ghanaian men in our study, eating food (rather than cooking it) is an integral part of socializing.  
235 Gatherings of Ghanaians, usually males, in the Netherlands involve eating together, speaking the local  
236 language, sharing stories from Ghana and sharing their feelings, which re-establishes their cultural  
237 identity.

238 The food is an African thing. When you go and meet someone, you always invite them to come and  
239 eat. [When] you invite someone to your home, you have to give them at least something to eat or  
240 drink. That is your welcome to him or her. So we have that also here. When we meet, there must be  
241 something of that [part of our] culture in that. (Kwaku, male, age group 46 – 50, length of residence in  
242 the Netherlands: 16 years)

243 During observations in the Ghanaian shop (situated in a middle-sized city in the east of the  
244 Netherlands), it became clear that the shop is a valued place to the participants, especially the women.  
245 There, where they purchase ingredients, the involvement in the food preparation process is evident.  
246 The shop literally surrounds the customers with products from Ghana and Africa, and some people  
247 described the shop as a 'home'. Our observation in the shop gave insights into the atmosphere of the  
248 shop and the role it serves in the lives of the participants (Figure 1).

249 Serwa's Ghanaian shop is a colourful building between the other shops on one of the main shopping  
250 streets. The Ghanaian flag is flying, which makes the shop even more prominent, and it offers a  
251 welcome to its customers. At the entrance, food and drinks are displayed on the left-hand side. Against  
252 the wall on the left are shelves with different kinds of products. Next to and opposite the shelves are  
253 refrigerators and freezers with food such as fish and vegetables. The scent of food and strong spices  
254 engulfs the visitor. African music plays from a radio in the corner and a television in another corner of  
255 the shop is tuned to an African channel.

256 The right side of the shop shows another aspect of African cultural influence, displaying all sorts of  
257 products for the hair and personal grooming. Different types and colours of hair and wigs are displayed.  
258 Even more hair products and cosmetics fill a counter of glass showcases. In the back of the store is a  
259 space that is used for hairdressing, and is separated from the rest of the shop by some walls with  
260 windows; customers also gather in this separate space and use it as a social place. Serwa explained  
261 that image and appearance are very important to Ghanaian women and she sells a lot of her African  
262 products to them. The people entering the shop during our observation were of African descent and  
263 dressed in jeans and shirts, with the exception of a few women in colourful traditional clothes. Most  
264 people coming in were women.



Figure 1. Impression of a Ghanaian shop. Photo by Owner of the shop.

Everyone entering the shop made conversation with other customers in the store; the shop clearly has a social function and comes across as a culturally influenced gathering place. The owner seemed to play an important role in the social setting created in the shop. Her dream was to be independent and cater to the Ghanaian/African community, which she can do by importing products from her home country and providing Ghanaian products to the migrant community.

Quoting one of the customers:

I always talk about you: here it is home, with [Serwa]. I cannot buy everything here, but what I can buy here, I take from here. Also when the kids could not go home to eat something after school, I said: go to [Serwa], there you can get something to eat and I will go and pay later. Here is home.

Serwa runs the shop in African food products, but also mentioned her changing eating habits (from Ghanaian to more Dutch). In running the shop she still expresses her Ghanaian roots; she combines traditions from both cultures, and both places are important to her social well-being.



Sharing, eating and buying food from Ghana is one of the ways through which participants confirm home identity and a sense of belonging and manifest social relations. Food evokes nostalgia and the Ghanaian shop creates an opportunity to re-engage in their native culture. The Ghanaian men as well as women relate the whole process of buying, cooking, sharing and eating food to their home culture, although there are different gendered experiences related to food.

Whereas the women in this study relate food to cooking and caring, the men relate it more to eating and sharing, differences that are linked to traditional gender roles. Food is also a reflection of the organization of a society, not only economically but also socially and culturally. Eating good food in good company enhances pleasurable feelings; conversely, when social relations break down, food tastes different and eating can be unpleasant.

## *6.2 Gendered experiences of faith*

In the decision to migrate, as well as in settling in the host country, shared religious activities are important. Our study is based on the experiences of Christian Ghanaian immigrants, who are mainly members of Protestant or Catholic churches. Migrants' religious beliefs are shaped by the migration process, and the migrants' trust in God may become stronger or weaker throughout this journey. Religion plays a major role in establishing a new position in the host country and also in preserving religious identity from the home country. Badu' explains what religion means to him:

First, ehm, you oblige following [the] sentences in the Bible and it brings some peace to you. You know that, you always believe there is belief, that turns on happiness, there is a spirit behind everything. (Male, age group 36 – 40, length of residence in the Netherlands: 4 years)

Religion is important in the lives of our participants in times of both hardship and celebration. Women who were interviewed about their religion emphasized the strong connection between religion and church. All the women interviewed play an active role in their church and they feel the church is a place where people share fundamental aspects of their identity, such as being religious and being a migrant.

303 [ ... ] that social relationship that we enjoy in the church is quite important. Very, very important and  
304 when you go home, that is spectacular. [ ... ] because there you share experiences with other people,  
305 you talk to each other, when you have a problem, you share. People will come and [talk about] their  
306 problem and how it was solved and it will give you some encouragement [that] the problem you have,  
307 will be solved one day. (Yaa, female, age group 31 – 35, length of residence in the Netherlands: 8 years)

308 When people join a community and are embedded in a social network, they experience a transition in  
309 their status from outsider to insider. Within religion or belief, everyone is the same and the participants  
310 feel it is one of the few feelings that does not need adjustment to a new environment. The possibility  
311 of feeling the same connection across geographical boundaries creates a sense of safety, which is  
312 important to the social well-being of the participants.

313 I believe as a Christian, that we should not stop meeting as Christians. Wherever I find myself it is good  
314 to meet. We can share our faith and our feelings. (Tawiah, female, age group 31 – 35, length of  
315 residence in the Netherlands: 1 year)

316 From our observation at a church in Amsterdam, we found that there is a strong sense within  
317 international congregations that faith transcends geographical boundaries, and that it is a source of  
318 support for church communities all over the world.

319 Father Affum was the Ghanaian priest who led the service. Together with other priests, he established  
320 the African congregation. He is very committed to spreading the word of God and inspiring members  
321 of his church, and travelling to Europe to continue supporting the faith of his 'brothers and sisters' in  
322 the Netherlands is part of this work. He tries to be a leader to the church by keeping contact with  
323 members of his congregation. (Observation, April 2010)

324 The emotional support for the members of the congregation is emphasized by the presence of a  
325 Ghanaian priest. Participants feel secure celebrating their faith with this familiar, respected person.  
326 Being part of a social network, which a church offers, in addition to the experiences specific to church,

327 is crucially important to social well-being. A church offers psychological support, trust and acceptance,  
328 which again reinforce the extension of social ties. Smaller groups within the church, such as bible study  
329 and prayer groups, can create meaningful social relations. Gita gives an example:

330 Sometimes we women come together in church and talk about marriage and other things. The women  
331 and men, they group together. We talk about what you can do to satisfy your marriage and also the  
332 way you can talk to your husband. And we make the men also [share] about the way you can talk to  
333 your wife. (Female, age group 31 – 35, length of residence in the Netherlands: 12 years)

334 As dancing, singing and playing music are a large part of the church service, participants feel that they  
335 recreate a Ghanaian place of worship in the Netherlands. Dressing up for a service is important. The  
336 effort taken by participants to put on African attire is a gesture to the whole community and is a way  
337 of showing respect to God as well as to the community. It also serves as a status symbol for the women.  
338 Within the larger society, participants do not always feel empowered, but within the church they  
339 matter; they can contribute their services and create a sense of belonging.

340 The way they dress and their participation in the church choir earn them respect, as explained by  
341 Panyin and Juba.

342 I find it very nice, I am very happy about it. If you go to the church once a week [you] see [your] African  
343 friends and we are talking and singing and dancing. It makes me happy, because when I was here in  
344 the beginning, my Father was here as well. And then I dress myself in nice African clothes. All [the]  
345 people dance and then I feel like I am home. (Panyin, female, age group 36 – 40, length of residence  
346 in the Netherlands: 12 years)

347 In the church you have to share faith, wherever you are, whatever you do, no matter how late it is, you  
348 have to contribute to the church. And I think I can do that by joining the choir, to give the admiration  
349 [inspiration]. In the church it is something the choir does, it inspires people. And I wanted to be part  
350 of that. (Juba, female, age group 31 – 35, length of residence in the Netherlands: 1.5 years)

351 Our observations supported the opinions shared by the participants:

352 After the service coffee and tea were served. Although some people left, the majority of the women  
353 stayed and chatted with each other. They stayed at the church up to two hours after the service,  
354 interacting and socializing. They were talking to each other, shaking hands and hugging or giving one  
355 another a pat on the shoulder. Children were running around. People were calling out each other's  
356 names and making conversation. The church was lively and rang with laughter. (Observation, April  
357 2010)

358 A topic that often arose in the interviews was the difference between the Dutch population and the  
359 participants in their approach towards religion. The participants feel supported by religion and being  
360 close to God. They believe God affects their path in life and helps them improve their life. In contrast,  
361 they notice that many Dutch people are not religious. Male participants especially focused on these  
362 differences, which showed their connection to the tradition that originated in Ghana.

363 But I see a lot of very Christian, [call them] religious, Dutch people. But a lot, about 80 percent of  
364 people, they just think there is no God. But in Ghana, wow, you really feel it. You are qualified, but you  
365 don't have a job. Then you see everything is shattered, you can be hungry and it makes you closer to  
366 God. [ ... ] It really makes you believe in something, whereas the Dutch don't believe in anything  
367 because, everything is there for them, so what should they worry about? (Abebe, male, age group 26  
368 – 30, length of residence in the Netherlands: 2 years)

369 It is a comfort to the participants to find the same way of celebrating their faith in another country  
370 than Ghana. The environment of the church provides participants with a connection to the traditions,  
371 norms, values and beliefs of the home country, and a sense of belonging and security.

### 372 6.3 Community

373 Relationships with fellow immigrants play a crucial role in the enhancement of social well-being among  
374 our participants. A strong, secure identity, which is a positive contribution to the social well-being of  
375 the men and women in the study, is often determined by the prevailing attitudes among immigrants  
376 and the responses of the host society to them. Social ties with other migrants can be forged  
377 independently, and such ties often build trust and happiness.

378 Many of the participants highly valued and strove to build a secure social network. Kwaku explains the  
379 general importance of friends:

380 It helps, you see, to revive you mentally. Because of the pressure and stress here, it helps to have  
381 human contact. No matter what you are, you have to have human contacts [ ... ]. You cannot switch  
382 on the TV or radio, and sit there without having any social contacts to relieve you from stress and  
383 worries and other things. This is something that helps me in my life. I always feel refreshed, when  
384 I [have] talked to friends. (Male, age group 46 – 50, length of residence in the Netherlands: 16 years)

385 We found that relationships with other Ghanaian or African migrants in the Netherlands serve as a  
386 basis for developing positive feelings in and towards the Netherlands. Participants feel they  
387 understand other Ghanaian migrants, and migrants in general, because of similarities in their cultural  
388 background and experiences. The amount of time participants have spent in the Netherlands does not  
389 seem to affect this view. Some of the participants described their contacts with other migrants as  
390 'coming home'. Kwami and Gita refer to the relationships they have established with other Ghanaians:

391 In Ghana it is not difficult to make friends. Here you are in a foreign country and when you see that  
392 you are from the same country, you spontaneously become known to one another. It doesn't take  
393 a long time. I don't have a lot of friends here apart from those Ghanaians. (Kwami, male, age group 31  
394 – 35, length of residence in the Netherlands: 6 years)

395

396 The Ghanaian people are very hospitable and will do anything for you. You are all brothers and sisters.  
397 You are not easily [allowed] into this community of brothers and sisters, especially not as a foreigner.  
398 But for me it is very great to be part of it, also in the Netherlands. (Gita, female, age group 31 – 35,  
399 length of residence in the Netherlands: 12 years)

400 All participants recognized the existence of ‘networks’ of Ghanaians and focused their accounts on the  
401 existence and importance of these networks in their lives. These networks were different for every  
402 participant, and could be formal as well as informal.

403 Participants described the way they interacted as spontaneous. In addition, Ghanaian friends were  
404 often referred to as ‘brothers and sisters’. This gendered kin relationship was frequently mentioned,  
405 indicating strong social cohesion among the Ghanaian community. Well-being at the level of  
406 community is related to the sharing of emotions of being a transnational, a family of transnationals,  
407 who strive for a communal identity and a persona of their experiences.

408 Social relations relate to many different parts of the immigrants’ lives, as seen in the observation notes.  
409 The sense of community is also incorporated into their economic and political behaviour.

410 At the end of the church service a woman came forward to address the congregation. She had visited  
411 the church before. She is a politician and visited at the beginning of March canvassing for votes for the  
412 regional elections. Now she was visiting the church to inform the people that she had been re-elected  
413 to the municipal executive board. She thanked the people in the church for their support. The  
414 congregation cheered and shouted with joy when she announced her re-election. (Observation, April  
415 2010)

416 In public domains, migrants are often more influenced by the host society. This may indicate that  
417 migrants focus on the host country in certain respects, but remain ‘untouched’ in other respects, as  
418 they are closely linked to fellow migrants in the host country and maintain close connections to their  
419 home country.

420 Serwa also exemplifies the stories of the Ghanaian migrant women in our study. Most of our female  
421 participants are independent women with their own ideas on how they relate to their home country  
422 and the host country. Abena confirms the independent status of Ghanaian women and the pride they  
423 have in their independence:

424 I always felt independent. That is the way I was raised. I had great times at boarding school, there I  
425 learned to be independent, to grow up. That is also how I came to my decision to go to the Netherlands.  
426 This independence can [take] you anywhere. (Female, age group 36 – 40, length of residence in the  
427 Netherlands: 20 years)

428 While life in Ghana largely took place outdoors and was more informal, and Ghana was a place where  
429 friends are easily made, by comparison making friends is more difficult in the Netherlands. With ‘the  
430 life outdoors’ the participants try to represent the place in which they grew up. By extending these  
431 elements of the life in Ghana to their lives in the Netherlands, participants create a sense of  
432 familiarity and continuity.

433 [Apart] from the people I [mix with] here, you always interact with other Ghanaians. It doesn’t matter  
434 if they are in Amsterdam or Rotterdam, you do communicate. You are surrounded by them. [ ... ]  
435 Actually in this country, you really get to know the Ghanaians. Then you see who we really are and that  
436 they can help because they understand who you are. (Kodyo, male, age group 36 – 40, residential  
437 duration in the Netherlands: 2 years)

438 Badu’ his shares his views:

439 [ ... ] the whole day you experience the Dutch life, outside. You are working, [you] have people around  
440 you, in the street, in the city, in the shops, you try to interact. And you know,

441

442 you still need to feel some kind of nativity [the participant means 'ethnicity'] around you. (Male, age  
443 group 36 – 40, length of residence in the Netherlands: 4 years)

444 The male participants in particular emphasized their relationship with their home country, because  
445 they often leave their wife and children behind in Ghana. They continue to provide for their family and  
446 kin, often in the form of remittances. This responsibility affects their sense of social well-being, since  
447 they are proud of, as well as under pressure in, providing this support.

448 Like now, I am living here, I can contact them. I will do anything, [if] there is something I have to do.  
449 If there is something with my parents or wife or kid, I will do everything. But they will always call me  
450 when there is some information; we share information and advice on different matters. Then you know  
451 you are part of them. That is how I see it. (Kwami, male, age group 31 – 35, length of residence in the  
452 Netherlands: 6 years)

453 It is your responsibility, all the things that I am doing [are] my responsibility. I have to do it. And [in]  
454 this case, I have to support my family. Of course the extended family is there, so you have to support  
455 them also, but it is not that, especially when the situation changes, it is not that. But you feel that you  
456 cannot support them as you wish. But you must, you must ... . (Mosi, male, age group 36 – 40, length  
457 of residence in the Netherlands: 7 years).

458 For men, the welfare of their wife and children in Ghana is their first priority, geographical boundaries  
459 notwithstanding. The expression of love and commitment in sending remittances and receiving them  
460 sustains the bond between families, communities and traditions in the home country. The migrants  
461 maintain social networks with other Africans to prove they still live up to their original values and  
462 habits. For the participants it is a sign of their commitment to the home country. The sense of belonging  
463 gained from social ties with fellow migrants provides immigrants with an opportunity to express their  
464 identity and roots, emotions and shared experiences within an environment that they trust. It is not  
465 likely that norms and values will be fully replaced as migrants integrate into the host society when the



collectivistic sense of the original culture is a significant feature of the sense of social well-being among groups of migrants.

## **7. Conclusion**

This study highlights the role of food, faith and community in the social well-being of Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands, as remembrances of the traditions of their home country and transitions to new traditions in the host country. With an emphasis on the place-based lived experiences of women and men, we have made a contribution to the various insights into migrants' sense of place and culture.

Our results show how place-based social networks increase a sense of social well-being among migrants by contributing to their self-esteem and their sense of belonging and recognition. Local communities, within a small geographical distance, were often specifically mentioned, but the wider community networks, for example in The Hague or Amsterdam, were known to all participants and made use of for larger (formal) meetings. Social networks, in the home as well as in the host country, determine the networks' landscape of the participants, wherein the communities known to the participants are often 'connected communities' (Bonnerjee et al. 2012), which they share with most other migrants. The participants show the construction of social well-being functions as a production of well-being that can be built in different places, dependent on some primary needs. Participants are active agents who create their own state of well-being, which is also put forward in theories on well-being (for example, Ormel et al. 1999). When needs such as affection and status are met and remain a stable factor in the life of the individual, the feelings of social well-being will be enhanced.

In the accounts of the female participants, we found that the independent character of the women in our study played a large role in their own construction of social well-being, focusing on the establishment of social networks within the host society, whereas the men were much more focused on links to Ghana, often because they had left their family in their country of origin. Coe's (2011) study

indicates that the Ghanaian migrants and their families residing in Ghana are dependent on this relationship, as material resources not only fill primary needs, but also show love and care. We encountered these feelings among our participants as well, but our participants also shared the burden of care-taking across boundaries. Place making in the Netherlands is bound by the significance of care-taking responsibilities in the host country.

By adhering to their traditions, norms and values, participants also strengthened their sense of belonging to Ghana and its culture. This aligns with McAdoo, Younge, and Getahun (2007), who emphasize that it is not likely for norms and values to be replaced when migrants are established in the host society. In social life with friends and family, traditions are expressed by eating and sharing Ghanaian food, speaking the language, celebrating festivities according to their traditions and in general by doing things the participants would do in Ghana. The ideas and values the participants have are incorporated in their daily experiences with food. The stories of our participants show how ideologies and values are interwoven with experiences of food (see also Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2008; Johnston and Longhurst 2012). Still, some of our participants changed their cooking and eating habits, for example, to adjust to the Dutch lifestyle. With their personal experiences in the rituals of making certain food, women can display their knowledge and find empowerment in the act of cooking. Because some dishes can only be prepared with specific knowledge of the ingredients and actions related to this dish, women can even physically experience their knowledge (Matthee 2004). Also, narratives of relationships of inclusion and exclusion – who is included or excluded in a ritual of consumption – tell a story of the influences at work in the production of identities. In this study, men as well as women were involved in food practices, but they took on different roles. Their identities in this respect help explain their different approaches to social well-being. We find support for our findings from Mintz and Du Bois (2002, 109) who state that food ‘serves both to solidify group membership and to set groups apart’.

Our observations confirmed that the opportunities for interaction and socializing provided by church and African shops were generally embraced by the participants, especially the women, who visited the shop and were active in church. These places recreated elements of their home culture and fostered social relationships. As shown in social network theories, connections determine the content of the relationships and the structure of the network. The patterns and implications of these relationships impact the behaviour of individuals within the network as well as the functioning of the group as a whole. Although much of the relevant literature (Oishi 2002; Aroian, Norris, and Chiang 2003) shows that social contacts are more important to women than men, this was not evident from the interviews with our participants as male participants also affirmed that social interaction was something to be embraced. Social networks formed by church activities exert a positive influence on social well-being by re-creating familiar places and practices, providing a sense of belonging and opportunities to contribute to a community, and by enhancing social status. Such a sense of belonging and stability in a host country should not be undervalued (Supski 2006).

Knowledge on social well-being augments knowledge of different cultures and has the potential to increase tolerance between different cultural groups; increased knowledge can lead to such groups living with each other, instead of merely next to each other. Migrant organizations, churches and other gathering places may play a crucial role in establishing a closer relationship between Ghanaian migrants and Dutch society.

According to Werkuyten and Nekuee (1999), studies on subjective well-being should also take migrant status into account. Their cultural status and sense of discrimination in particular are topics that make migrants a special group in the analysis of social well-being.

In the context of the discussions of Hall (1990) and Brah (2008) on the continuity and change of identities among people, specifically in societies with increasingly diverse groups, this study emphasizes that different places contribute to the migratory process. Migrant women in particular are

searching for a renewed identity, in which both new and old connections play a role (see also Hopkins 2010). As this study has shown, migrants (women as well as men) start new traditions from old traditions; they create new places and recreate old ones. Place making is of great importance in the (re)creation of a positive social well-being.

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669 ABSTRACT TRANSLATIONS

670 El alimento, la fe y el bienestar social de la comunidad de las y los inmigrantes ghaneses en los Países  
671 Bajos

672 Este artículo analiza como las y los inmigrantes ghaneses en los Países Bajos aumentan su bienestar  
673 social generizado. Ofrecemos una visión profunda de los lugares y relaciones género-específicos  
674 que dan forma al bienestar social de los inmigrantes, centrándonos en las experiencias vividas  
675 basadas en el lugar, llevando a cabo entrevistas y observaciones en profundidad. Nuestros  
676 resultados demuestran que el bienestar social mejora con las redes sociales, donde los  
677 participantes recrean sentimientos de autoestima, pertenencia y reconocimiento. Además, el  
678 significado especial del alimento y la fe también contribuyeron al bienestar social de las y  
679 los participantes. La comida y la fe cumplen funciones de conmemoraciones de las tradiciones en  
680 su país de origen y facilitan la transición a las nuevas tradiciones en el país huésped. Encontramos  
681 también que ciertos lugares específicos, tales como tiendas e iglesias, contribuyen al bienestar  
682 social de las y los participantes en el estudio. Hombres y mujeres en nuestro estudio utilizan  
683 diferentes estrategias para construir su bienestar, e interpretan diferentemente los lugares y las  
684 relaciones sociales, pero todos mostraron ser agentes activos en la mejora de su bienestar social.  
685 Nuestras participantes mujeres en particular buscan oportunidades en el país huésped para  
686 mejorar de forma independiente su bienestar social, por ejemplo, a través del establecimiento de  
687 sus pequeños negocios y grupos sociales propios. A través de su atención al bienestar social de  
688 los y las inmigrantes, el estudio contribuye a mejorar la comprensión entre diferentes grupos  
689 culturales.

690 Palabras claves: inmigración; bienestar social; redes sociales; Ghana; los Países Bajos; investigación  
691 cualitativa

692 荷兰境内迦纳移民的食物、信仰与社群的社会福祉

本文探讨荷兰境内的迦纳移民，如何增进其性别化的社会福祉。我们透过进行深度访谈与观察，聚焦根据地方的生活经验，提供形塑移民社会福祉的特定性别地方及关系的深度视角。我们的研究结果证实，社会网络促进了社会福祉，参与者从中再建立了自尊、归属感与认可。此外，食物与信仰的特殊意义，亦对于参与者的社会福祉做出了贡献。食物与信仰提供做为移民者的母国传统的纪念，并缓和了他们进入移民国的新传统的转换过程。我们在研究中同时发现，特殊的地方，例如商店和教堂，对于研究参与者的社会福祉有所贡献。本研究中的男性与女性，运用不同的策略来创造他们的福祉，并且以不同的方式诠释地方与社会关系，但却同时展现做为促进其社会福祉的积极行动者。特别是本研究的女性参与者在移民国中寻求机会，例如透过建立自己的小型商业和社会团体，以独立地增进其社会福祉。本研究透过聚焦移民的社会福祉，对于增进不同文化团体之间的相互理解做出贡献。

关键词：移民; 社会福祉; 社会网络; 迦纳; 荷兰; 质性研究